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Resisting the Buck-Passing Account

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1. Introduction

T. M. Scanlon's "buck-passing account" of value continues a long tradition of analyzing value in terms of non-evaluative normative notions.[1] Buck-passers about value hold (speaking roughly for now) that to be valuable is nothing more or other than to have other properties that provide reasons for certain positive responses—namely, certain "pro-attitudes" and/or actions expressive of them—to the bearers of those properties. This is to pass the normative "buck" from value onto other properties: the reasons to favor valuable things are provided not by their value but by the properties that make them valuable (Scanlon, 1998: 97). To illustrate, as the prospects of reaching Mordor turn bleak and Frodo Baggins's spirit falters, Samwise Gamgee tries to lift Frodo's mood with an evaluative claim: "There's some good in this world, and it's worth fighting for."[2] According to the format of analysis favored by buck-passers, the fact that something is worth fighting for would just be the fact that it has other properties that provide

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[1] Scanlon introduces the buck-passing account of value in his (1998: 95–8). Other recent proponents of the view include Parfit (2001), Suikkanen (2004), and Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006). Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) provide a useful overview of the tradition Scanlon continues.

[2] The line is from the movie *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers.*

reasons to fight for it. In this paper, I first clarify my target by addressing questions about buck-passers' format of value analysis, and about its scope in particular. I then build a resistance front to the buck-passing account of value by raising problems for its various forms.

2. What is a Buck-Passing Account of Value?

The basic idea of buck-passing is easy to grasp, but presentations of the view leave it unclear what exactly the view is supposed to be. I begin by clarifying my target on buck-passers' behalf. As we'll see, the buck-passing account comes in many forms which we must address separately.

Scanlon introduces his view by considering the relations between properties that "can be grounds for concluding that [something] is valuable. . . the property of being valuable, and the reasons that we have for behaving in certain ways in regard to things that are valuable":

> There seem to be two possibilities. The first is [Moore's view] that when something has the right natural properties it has the further property of being valuable, and that property gives us reason to behave or react in certain ways with regard to it. . . [Contrary to Moore, I believe] that being good, or valuable, is not a property that itself provides a reason to respond to a thing in certain ways. Rather, to be good or valuable is to have other properties that constitute such reasons. . . . [T]his account takes goodness and value to be. . . the purely formal, higher-order properties of having some lower-order properties that provide reasons of the relevant kind. . . . [I]t is not goodness or value itself that provide reasons but rather other properties that do so. For this reason I call it a buck-passing account. (Scanlon, 1998: 97)

Here Scanlon advances two theses about value, one negative and the other positive:

- (BP$^-$) Being good, or valuable, isn't itself a reason-providing property. The fact that an object *o* is good, or valuable, isn't itself a reason to respond to *o* in certain favorable ways.[3]
- (BP$^+$) Being good, or valuable, *just is* the purely formal, higher-order property of having other property or properties *P* that provide reasons to respond to things having *P* in certain favorable ways.

[3] I understand 'object' broadly to include any type of value-bearer. Facts or true propositions are better candidates than properties for things that have the property *being a reason*. So when Scanlon writes of properties as being what *provide* reasons, I take him to mean that for a property *P* to provide a reason to (say) favor *o* is for the fact that *o* has *P* to be (i.e. to have the property of being) a reason to favor *o*. It is important that the reasons be practical: a thing needn't be valuable merely if there are reasons to investigate or reflect on its properties.

The reasons in question are *justifying* practical reasons. Scanlon (like many others) paraphrases 'a reason' for something as "a consideration that counts in favor of it" (1998: 17). He seems to assume that if a thing's having a certain property *makes* it valuable, thereby giving a reason *why* it is of value, then that property provides a reason *for* certain favorable responses to it.[4] Buck-passing is meant to provide a formal account of value, so it should be silent on *which* properties provide reasons; intuitive candidates include pleasure, health, and knowledge.[5] Whichever these properties are, what matters is that their instances have the property of being reasons.[6] Scanlon leaves it unclear which pro-attitudes constitute the relevant favorable responses, but he notes that they "generally include, as a common core, reasons for admiring the thing and for respecting it" (1998: 95).

Buck-passers often present (BP^-) as essential to their view, apparently because they assume that (BP^-) follows from (BP^+).[7] Scanlon also appears to assume that (BP^+) and the negation of (BP^-)—that is, the view that goodness is a reason-providing property, which Scanlon (correctly or not) attributes to G. E. Moore—exhaust the options. But each of these assumptions is mistaken. Buck-passers should define their view just in terms of its positive thesis.

Take the first assumption first. Given (BP^+), the fact that an object *o* is valuable amounts to the following higher-order fact:

(HOF) *o* has properties (other than being valuable) which provide reasons to respond to *o* in certain favorable ways.

Substituting (HOF) for the fact that *o* is valuable, (BP^-) says that (HOF) doesn't itself constitute a reason to respond to *o* in the relevant favorable ways. That claim doesn't follow from (BP^+) alone. We can agree that (HOF) neither gives any *additional* reason to favor *o* beyond the reasons provided by the properties that make *o* valuable nor is what *ultimately* provides the reason to favor *o instead of* the properties that make *o* valuable. But what if I know (perhaps by testimony) that something has properties

[4] See Scanlon (1998: 97) and Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006: 153). I'll grant this assumption, but we should note that the relation of making something valuable is distinct from the relation of providing a reason to respond to it in a certain way (cf. Dancy, 2004: 79–80). The former relates (tokens of) value properties to (tokens of) other properties, the latter relates (tokens of) those other properties to attitudes and/or actions.

[5] This is the sense in which pleasure, health, knowledge, and so on, are sometimes said to be "values".

[6] Whether their instances must be reasons always, or only in certain circumstances, depends on such further issues in the theory of reasons as whether some form of holism about reasons is correct (see s. 4 below).

[7] See e.g. Scanlon (1998: 97), Parfit (2001: 19–20), and Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006: 149).

that provide reasons to favor it, without knowing what those properties are? One option is to say that (HOF) is a reason to *believe* that there is a reason to favor *o* but is not itself a reason to favor *o*. Another is to say that (HOF) serves as a *derivative* reason to favor *o* which is accounted for by other facts about *o*. The latter idea would be that (HOF) states the sort of thing that can be a reason for action: in the circumstances in question, acting in the light of (HOF) would qualify as acting for a reason, and acting for a reason requires acting on the basis of the sort of thing that can be a reason for action. [8] Since (BP^+) is completely silent on which of these views is correct, (BP^-) doesn't follow from (BP^+) alone (unless it is revised to say that being valuable isn't among the properties that *ultimately* provide reasons).

(BP^+) and the view which (BP^-) negates also don't exhaust the options. One of Scanlon's arguments for the buck-passing account is an argument from intuitions about reasons:

> [W]hen I consider particular cases it seems that the [reasons to choose, prefer, recommend, and admire things that are valuable] are provided by the natural properties that make a thing good or valuable. So, for example, the fact that a resort is pleasant is a reason to visit it or to recommend it to a friend, and the fact that a discovery casts light on the causes of cancer is a reason to applaud it and to support further research of that kind. . . . It is not clear what further work could be done by special reason-providing properties of goodness and value, and even less clear how these properties could provide reasons. (Scanlon, 1998: 97)

Notice that it is perfectly coherent (i) to accept Scanlon's intuition about which sort of properties (ultimately) provide reasons, (ii) to accept that whenever something is valuable, it has the higher-order property of having other properties that provide reasons, but (iii) to hold that this higher-order property is distinct from the property of being valuable. Since Scanlon's argument fails to eliminate any such view, it fails as an argument for (BP^+) even if it succeeds as an argument for (BP^-). [9]

Buck-passers about value should define their view just in terms of their positive thesis, then. But a number of issues remain about how (BP^+)

[8] I am indebted to Michael Smith for making this point in conversation.

[9] This criticism of the argument is essentially Dancy's (2000: 164–5), with inessential simplifications and minor modifications. Scanlon's other argument for (BP^+) is "the fact that many different things can be said to be good or to be valuable, and the grounds for these judgments vary widely. There does not seem to be a single, reason-providing property that is common to all these cases" (1998: 97–8). Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006: 156–7) show that this argument fails as well. It assumes the plurality of the good whereas both the buck-passing account and its rivals are neutral as between pluralism and monism. If hedonism, for example, were the correct substantive axiology, then the buck-passing account would also imply that all instances of value have in common a single ultimate reason-providing property.

should be understood. To begin, is the thesis meant to be metaphysical or conceptual? Buck-passers tend to go back and forth between describing their view as a doctrine about facts and properties and describing it at the level of language or concepts.[10] But the possibility of defining evaluative concepts in terms of the concept of a reason is consistent with rejecting much of what buck-passers say in their metaphysical mode. Defining one concept in terms of another doesn't always settle the direction of metaphysical priority between what the two concepts are concepts of. Hence I'll take buck-passers' core thesis to be that reasons are metaphysically prior to value, in that the property of being valuable isn't metaphysically independent but is analyzable in terms of the property of having reason-providing properties.[11]

The downside of construing buck-passers' core thesis as a metaphysical claim is that buck-passers tell us very little about how they think of properties.[12] The issue matters. One way to defend (BP^+) would be to argue that the property of being valuable is necessarily co-extensive with the sort of higher-order property that figures in (BP^+) and then appeal to the necessary co-extension test for property-identity: for any properties *A* and *B*, if *A* is necessarily co-extensive with *B*, then *A* and *B* are the same property. Scanlon himself cannot appeal to this argument for (BP^+). He denies that we can identify the property of being valuable with any non-normative property (1998: 96). But it is possible to construct a (possibly infinite disjunctive) property expressed in purely descriptive terms, which is necessarily co-extensive with the property of being valuable (Jackson, 1998: 118–25). Given how sets are individuated, the identity of necessarily co-extensive properties is difficult to avoid if we think of a property as the set of all its actual and possible instances (Lewis, 1999). Thus, if buck-passers accept this conception of properties, they'll have difficulty avoiding the conclusion that the property of being valuable and the property of being reason-providing are identical to properties expressible in purely descriptive terms.[13] Since buck-passers

[10] Scanlon speaks of the view indiscriminately in metaphysical terms and as the conceptual claim that "to call something valuable is to say that it has other properties that provide reasons for behaving in certain ways with regard to it" (Scanlon, 1998: 96). Suikkanen (2004) and Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006) are similarly undisciplined.

[11] In my usage of 'analysis', analysis is a specification of properties rather than concepts (see e.g. King, 1998).

[12] The buck-passing account allows for deflationary or minimalist conceptions of normative properties. It is also neutral between cognitivist and non-cognitivist accounts of normative judgment.

[13] I doubt we can understand buck-passers' use of the term 'property' as purely *pleonastic:* as taking every meaningful predicate to express a property and two predicates

don't tell us how they think of properties, I'll bracket the issue and ignore arguments for (BP$^+$) premised on the necessary co-extension test for property-identity.[14]

Recent arguments that (BP$^+$), as it stands, is an extensionally inadequate statement of buck-passers' positive thesis are also relevant to interpreting the view. These arguments offer cases where we appear to have reasons to respond favorably to things that aren't valuable. To illustrate this "wrong kind of reasons" problem, imagine that an evil demon is determined to punish me unless I admire him for his determination to punish me. I have a good reason to admire the demon's determination for its own sake, namely that I'll avoid severe pain if I do so, but clearly the reason I have to admire his determination is of a wrong kind to make it valuable.[15] Here I grant that buck-passers can restrict their positive thesis (in some appropriately formal way) to all and only the right kind of reasons.[16] The standard view of higher-order properties is that they are generated by quantification over some set **B** of lower-order "base" properties plus a condition on members of **B** (Kim, 1998: 19–20). In those terms, I grant that there is some extensionally adequate and appropriately formal specification of condition *R* in the following restatement of (BP$^+$):

(BP$^{+\prime}$) Being good, or valuable, just is the property of having some property *P* in **B** such that *R*(*P*), where *R* specifies a condition on members of **B** which is satisfied just by those properties in **B** that provide the right kind of reasons to respond to their bearers in certain favorable ways.

to express different properties if they are non-synonymous. In the pleonastic sense, the property of being valuable is distinct from the property of having other properties that provide reasons, unless (implausibly) 'is valuable' is synonymous with 'has other properties that provide reasons'.

[14] Buck-passers will eventually need to deal with the nature of properties. Suppose e.g. that hedonism turns out to be the correct substantive axiology, so that being valuable and being pleasant are necessarily co-extensive, but that buck-passers are right that being valuable doesn't (ultimately) provide reasons. In that event, nor could the property of being pleasant provide reasons, unless either properties, no matter how they are individuated, provide reasons only under certain descriptions, or else properties are individuated more finely than by necessary equivalence.

[15] Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004) discuss examples like this in great detail.

[16] For recent attempts, see e.g. Olson (2004) and Stratton-Lake (2005). An adequate solution should also address certain technical issues about how to formulate the buck-passing account. For example, if something is the lesser of two bads, it has a property that provides a reason to prefer it to the greater bad. Since the lesser bad might still be quite bad, it cannot have positive value simply because it has properties that provide reasons to prefer it. I ignore the issue because it should be possible to state the buck-passing account so as to handle betterness and worseness.

In what follows, I'll take the refinement as understood; below we'll see another purpose it serves.

One test for the plausibility of identifying goodness with the higher-order property in (BP$^{+\prime}$) is whether the latter property would fill the goodness role in the mature evaluative practice of the folk (Jackson and Pettit 1995). Since we don't know how the mature folk valuations will construe the goodness role, confidence that the "role property"—that is, the higher-order property of having the property that plays the goodness role—will be the higher-order property in (BP$^{+\prime}$) would be premature. Notice, for example, that although the supervenience of value properties on non-evaluative properties partly specifies the goodness role, (BP$^{+\prime}$) doesn't entail that practical reasons are ultimately provided only by non-evaluative properties. A further specification of the goodness role might be that something is valuable only if a subject would desire it if she satisfied all rational requirements and other ideals of reason. This, too, fails to support the buck-passing account, since not all rational requirements (for example, those of instrumental rationality) are analyzable in terms of a suitable sensitivity to reasons.[17]

The attractive assumption that *value is normative* is silent as well on whether the higher-order property in (BP$^{+\prime}$) is what fills the goodness role. For value to be normative is for it to make a difference to what one ought or has reason to do. If something is valuable, it merits certain favorable attitudes and there are reasons (at least for suitably situated agents) to adopt those attitudes.[18] I'll assume that value is intimately tied to pro-attitudes and reasons in this way. (BP$^{+\prime}$) explains that intimate tie by reducing value to reasons for the relevant attitudes. But the intimate tie is amenable to other explanations. It might be that something is good when it merits certain favorable attitudes, or when it has properties that provide reasons

[17] See e.g. Broome (2002) and Smith (forthcoming).

[18] The qualification in parentheses hides more than the idea that a reason must always be assigned to an agent who is in a position to act on it. It might turn out further that an agent has a reason only when she satisfies some "internalist" or other subjective condition on justifying reasons. Such conditions raise complications that I have no space to discuss, such as whether the buck-passing account would imply a corresponding subjective condition on value, and whether such a condition would be plausible. In this connection, I should also mention a related structural problem to which buck-passers have yet to give a convincing reply (*pace* Suikkanen, 2004: 531–3). The problem is Dancy's polyadicity objection. Something can be good (or bad) without a specification of the agent, whereas reasons always belong to agents; reasons don't hang around waiting to be assigned to agents. Therefore, no matter how many argument-places goodness has, it is less polyadic than reasons are. But if reasons are polyadic to degree *n*, then the higher-order property of having other properties that provide reasons is also polyadic to degree *n*. Therefore that higher-order property is more polyadic than goodness, in which case the two properties must be distinct. See Dancy (2000: 170).

to respond favorably to it, and yet that goodness isn't reducible to either of these things. Perhaps, for example, we have reasons to have certain attitudes to valuable things because those attitudes are appropriate to the value of the things in question. In that case, value would be something more fundamental that explains the reasons. Again, we cannot assume that specifying the goodness role generates an argument for the buck-passing account of value.

My focal question about buck-passers' positive thesis concerns its *scope:* to just *which* value properties is the buck-passing account of value supposed to apply? Buck-passers tend to speak only of being good, or valuable, but it is natural to wonder why their basic format of analysis shouldn't apply to other value properties as well. For (BP$^{+\prime}$) is just an instance of the following general schema (where V is a value property variable and **B** a set of base properties):

> (BP*) Being V just is the purely formal, higher-order property of having some property P in **B** such that $R(P)$, where R specifies a condition on members of **B** which is satisfied just by those properties in **B** that provide the right kind of reasons to respond to their bearers in certain favorable ways.

In (BP*) the qualification 'right kind' is more than a placeholder for a solution to the wrong kind of reasons problem. We need it to distinguish distinct value properties from each other. As Scanlon notes, what attitudes the reason-giving properties justify may be different in different cases (1998: 95). Different bearers of a particular value property may call for different attitudes, as with elegance in philosophical argument, elegance in dress, and elegance in chord change.[19] More importantly, instances of different value properties are often to be valued by means of different attitudes, as with being admirable and being trustworthy. Unless the right kind of reasons are those that bear specifically on whether something has a particular value property, there may be distinct value properties for which (BP*) yields the same analysans. Not all value properties, however, bear the kind of analytic connection to the relevant responses which would make it straightforward to analyze, for example, trustworthiness as possession of properties that provide reasons for trust.

To cash out this aspect of the qualification without the circularity in saying that instances of a value property call for those attitudes that are *appropriate* to their value, buck-passers might apply (BP*) in the light of our pre-theoretical views about what responses different value properties call

[19] Indeed, different responses may be apt to an elegant chord change in a jazz tune and in a punk rock song.

for (see Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen, 2004: 402). So understood, (BP*) generates a recipe for analyzing different value properties at least partly in terms of the different pro-attitudes which we have reasons to adopt towards their bearers.[20] But *which* value properties?

Applying (BP*) to different sets of value properties generates different forms of the buck-passing account. But, almost without fail, presentations of the view don't specify the intended scope of (BP*). Since (BP*) itself is so schematic that it is hard to know how to argue for or against it, we need to proceed by assessing more concrete forms of the view. One fruitful way to divide the options is to note that buck-passing may be either *all-out* or only *partial*. That is to say, relative to a view of what properties count as value properties in the first place, either *every* value property is the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*), or only *some* are.[21] For example, suppose we hold the permissive view that being intrinsically valuable, being morally valuable and being prudentially valuable (and the like), being kind and being generous (and the like), being elegant and being delicate (and the like), and being admirable and being desirable (and the like) all count as value properties in our normative sense. Then all-out buck-passing would hold that every single one of these value properties is the kind of higher-order property we find in (BP*). Different forms of partial buck-passing would restrict the scope of (BP*) only to different proper subsets of these value properties, and treat the rest as some more substantive sort of value properties.

In what follows, I proceed from the premise that the buck-passing account is either partial or all-out in its scope. The scope of the buck-passing account then depends on whether we can draw the kind of distinction among value properties which the truth of partial buck-passing requires, and how we draw it. Section 3 argues that the extant forms of partial buck-passing fail to draw such a distinction; hence they don't succeed in restricting themselves only to some proper subset of value properties. Section 4 builds a cumulative case for resisting all-out buck-passing. Section 5 criticizes a further positive argument for buck-passers' approach to value and offers brief concluding remarks.

[20] Nozick (1981: 429–30) provides a whopping 40-item list of ways of responding to value. As Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004: 416) note, the relevant pro-attitudes may have to have a complex intentional content: they may have to consist in favoring an object, in one way or another, on account of some of its properties.

[21] The relativity of the distinction to a set of value properties introduces the complication that materially one and the same view of the scope of (BP*) may be partial relative to one view of what counts as a value property but all-out relative to another. This makes the distinction less neat, but needn't diminish its heuristic value.

3. Resisting Partial Buck-Passing

Most buck-passers advance some form of partial buck-passing. While partial buck-passers rarely make the intended scope of their views explicit, their writings nonetheless contain a few suggestions as to how to restrict the scope of (BP*) only to some proper subset of value properties. I'll argue that, in each case, the form of partial buck-passing in question is unstable.

We have seen that buck-passers tend to talk only of the property of being good, or valuable, in stating their view. A literal interpretation is that (BP*) applies only to a property of being valuable which all and only valuable things have in common, in addition to whatever other value properties they may have—whether they are valuable intrinsically or extrinsically, for their own sakes or instrumentally, whether they are morally or aesthetically valuable, whether they are kind or courageous, or admirable or desirable, and so on.[22] In constructing an analysis of such a wholly generic value property, we must keep in mind that different types of valuable things may be valuable in different ways, in that they may call for different pro-attitudes. Letting **B** be a set of base properties and W range over pro-attitudes, the proposal must be something like this:

> (GBP) For any valuable object x, for x to be of value just is for x to have some property P in **B** such that, for some way of valuing W which x calls for, x's being P is a reason to respond to x in way W.

My objection to (GBP) relies on an assumption about properties which is plausible in the present context: instances of a property should exhibit some substantial commonality. We don't think that a wholly heterogeneous set of things as such makes a difference to what one ought or has reason to do. If (GBP) is to be an adequate analysis of a normative property, the condition it imposes on P should determine a class of ways of valuing that exhibit a substantial commonality. For (GBP) implies that there may be nothing more to being of value than the relevant similarities among the different attitudes with which we have reason to respond to different types

[22] Here I'll let pass the point that I myself find such a wholly generic property of being valuable obscure, for I find it hard to see what substantive commonality all and only the things that are valuable in all these very different ways are supposed to share. The point is akin to Judith Thomson's line on generic goodness (2003 and elsewhere). To be clear, my view is that, whatever Thomson's own intentions may be, her arguments truly target only the claim that there is such a thing as generic goodness, and *not* the claim that there are such properties as being intrinsically good or being valuable for its own sake. For we can treat the latter as ways of being good.

of valuable things. Those things may have nothing else in common, since to provide a reason is always to provide a reason for particular responses. The objection is that there may not be enough similarities to go around among the different ways of responding to valuable things for them to exhibit any substantial commonality. If so, the condition in (GBP) determines only a heterogeneous set of things.

One way to advance this objection is to argue that no sufficiently definite account may be available of what distinguishes positive responses ("pro-attitudes") from the negative ones ("con-attitudes"), and both from responses that are neither. The most promising way to draw these distinctions is based on the idea that pro-attitudes and con-attitudes are distinguished from attitudes that are neither by their involving some conative element and are distinguished from one another by the nature of the conative elements they involve.[23] If all pro-attitudes essentially involved a favorable conative element, (GBP) would determine a substantive conative commonality. But it seems that I can respect or appreciate various valuable things without being moved by them. I can understand that some operas have properties that provide reasons to respect them and various activities involving them, and yet not be irrational or pathological if they fail to engage me conatively. I can admire the way in which a jazz solo moves back to the root chord as neat or nifty, and in that sense appreciate its aesthetic value on the basis of my knowledge of the conventions of jazz, while being unmoved by jazz. Examples like these suggest that there is no guarantee that all pro-attitudes share a common conative core that distinguishes them from con-attitudes.[24] (The problem extends to separating pro- and con-attitudes as a class from the class of responses that are neither.) Thus we cannot assume that the condition on *P* in (GBP) determines a set of things with a substantial conative commonality.[25]

[23] Here I follow Rabinowicz and Rønnow-Rasmussen (2004: 401).

[24] Since my point here concerns attitudes, it doesn't seem to presuppose motivational externalism about reasons-judgments. But if you suspect that it does, note that motivational reasons-judgment externalism may be plausible even if motivational ought-judgment externalism isn't. The judgment that a consideration is normatively relevant in the way that reasons are may sometimes lack the kind of deliberative relevance which motivationally efficacious considerations have. Ought-judgments, by contrast, may well carry greater deliberative relevance.

[25] If the different responses that we have reasons to adopt towards different valuable things lack a common core that would make for a substantial commonality among all and only the valuable things, then (GBP) makes the generic notion of value indefinite. The indefiniteness doesn't result from ordinary phenomena such as the existence of borderline cases in the application of our evaluative language. Rather, (GBP) requires us to assume (controversially, to say the least) that properties themselves can be metaphysically indefinite. A fully generic notion of value may be indefinite in another way as well: many

Analyses can certainly be surprising. The analysans in (GBP) has much more structure to it, however, than one would have thought the analysandum even covertly to possess. Because of this, (GBP) seems more plausible as an analysans of the property of being valuable in a given particular way than of a wholly generic value property. Perhaps the property of being admirable, for example, is analyzable as possession of properties that provide reasons to admire their bearers. If that is the best way to read buck-passers' talk of "being good, or valuable," then what they offer us is a recipe for analyzing particular ways of being valuable: each way of being valuable is to be analyzed as possession of properties that provide (the right kind of) reasons to respond in certain specified ways *W*. This would broaden the scope of (BP*) so much that it would border on all-out buck-passing. In any case, it won't do for partial buck-passers to restrict themselves merely to (GBP).

The obvious alternative for partial buck-passers is to find some distinction that classifies *kinds* of value property in a way that explains why only some kinds of value property are the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*) whereas others are some more substantive kind of value properties. In fact, the writings of buck-passers point to at least *two* kinds of distinctions among value properties which might do the job. I'll discuss these in turn.

Buck-passers tend to present their view by contrasting it with the view that goodness is a reason-providing property, which they (correctly or not) attribute to Moore. Moore shares the tendency to speak of "goodness" and "value," but this is clearly sloppy on his part, as his real concern is with *intrinsic* value. Insofar as buck-passers mean to contrast their view with the view they take to be Moore's, they should claim that the property of being intrinsically valuable is analyzable as an instance of (BP*).[26] Assuming that intrinsic value is value that something has solely in virtue of its intrinsic properties, buck-passers would presumably analyze it as possession of intrinsic properties that provide reasons. But buck-passers' own examples preclude the restriction of (BP*) *solely* to intrinsic value. Scanlon's example of a holiday resort is relevant only if a pleasant resort has some type of value, but whatever type of value it has is presumably not intrinsic.

understand the talk of being valuable as shorthand for the talk of being valuable in some particular way. If asked which things are of value, many of us seek to identify whichever things we identify on the basis of the varied responses we think they merit, not on the basis of some substantive commonality. Of course, this does nothing to enhance the interest of a fully generic notion of value to value analysis.

[26] Curiously, Scanlon often qualifies 'good' and 'valuable' with 'intrinsically' in the discussion that precedes his presentation of the buck-passing account (1998: 88, 90–2), but drops the qualification when presenting it.

We can understand the value of a pleasant resort in one of two ways. A pleasant resort might have *final* value: it might be valuable *for its own sake*. (Final value is distinct from intrinsic value: an object might be valuable for its own sake partly in virtue of its being rare, but being rare isn't an intrinsic property.) More plausibly, a pleasant resort might have *instrumental* value: it might be valuable for the sake of something else. Perhaps the causal and constitutive relations it bears to other things make it conducive to something that is valuable for its own sake, such as pleasurable experiences. Whichever account we adopt of the value of a pleasant resort, we analyze its value in terms of final value, since being instrumentally valuable is analyzable in terms of being finally valuable.[27] Thus, if (BP*) is true of instrumental value, it must be true of final value as well.[28] One motivation to apply (BP*) to final value is that final value has a clear connection to practical reason. Thus one form of partial buck-passing restricts (BP*) to final value, and perhaps intrinsic value, plus any other value properties that are analyzable in terms of those two.[29]

Restricting the buck-passing account to final value suffers from essentially the same problem as (GBP).[30] A reason to favor something for its own sake may be either instrumental or non-instrumental.[31] Thus the buck-passing account of final value should be something like (FBP):

(FBP) For any object x, for x to be of final value just is for x to have some property P in the base set **B** such that, for some way of

[27] To some, Scanlon's example of a good resort might suggest that (BP*) applies to what Ross (1930: 65–7) calls "attributive goodness". This is the property of being good of a kind, of satisfying the standards of excellence in a kind. Buck-passers shouldn't apply (BP*) to attributive goodness because being good of a kind isn't necessarily connected to reasons. Consider the property of being a good assassin: for persons to satisfy the standards of excellence in assassinating isn't necessarily for them to have properties that provide reasons to respond favorably to them.

[28] Whether (BP*) is to be applied to instrumental value depends on the controversial issue whether instrumental value is itself a form of value at all, instead of something merely conducive to value. Another notion that seems analyzable in terms of final value is that of being "contributively good", that is, being such as to contribute to the final value of the whole of which it is a part (cf. Ross, 1930: 72). Whether (BP*) is to be applied to "contributive value" depends on the controversial issue whether contributive value is itself a form of value, rather than merely a relation to value (see n. 49). In this respect, contributive value is analogous to instrumental value.

[29] As Jonas Olson pointed out to me, the idea that buck-passing is primarily a view about final value is probably the traditional idea (see e.g. Ewing, 1947: 146).

[30] The parallel objection can be run against forms of partial buck-passing that restrict (BP*) to intrinsic value.

[31] For discussion, see Stratton-Lake (2005) whose solution to the wrong kind of reasons problem exploits this point.

> valuing *W* which *x* calls for, *x*'s being *P* is a non-instrumental reason to respond to *x* in way *W* for its own sake.

To see why (FBP) doesn't support restricting (BP*) to final value (and whatever other value properties are analyzable in its terms), notice that pretty much any attitude that is a possible value for *W* in (FBP) is one that we may have reason to hold for a thing's own sake in some cases but for the sake of something else in others. For example, some things are admirable for their own sakes but others are admirable only for the sake of something else. According to (FBP), they are finally valuable only if they have properties that provide non-instrumental reasons to admire them. These instances of admiration aren't different *in kind*. Indeed, your attitude of admiration is no different in kind if you admire people's keeping their promises but not because you think of promise-keeping as valuable in any way. What then distinguishes the responses that pertain to value from those that don't?

These observations show not that (FBP) is mistaken as such, but that it does little if anything to specify a particular class of different pro-attitudes that we may have non-instrumental reason to adopt to different kinds of things. This is a problem for forms of partial buck-passing built upon (FBP) because if (as argued above) the different pro-attitudes lack a common substantial core, then so do the pro-attitudes quantified over in (FBP). Reasoning that parallels our objection to (GBP) then shows that to apply (BP*) only to final value (and whatever value properties are analyzable in its terms) is merely to apply selectively a general recipe for analyzing different ways of being valuable. If so, (FBP) gives partial buck-passers no independent grounds for restricting (BP*) merely to final value, and the general recipe itself again broadens the scope of (BP*) so much that it borders on all-out buck-passing. An adequate restriction of (BP*) only to some subset of value properties requires some other type of distinction among value properties.

One distinction that we might take to explain why only some kinds of value property are the sort of higher-order property we find in (BP*) appears in Scanlon's response to a tension between his presentation of the buck-passing account and his account of practical reflection on reasons. In discussing the buck-passing account in *What we Owe to Each Other*, Scanlon claims that reasons are typically provided by the natural properties of things rather than their goodness or value (1998: 97).[32] But he also suggests that judgments about reasons involve a distinctively "evaluative element" (1998: 38), that

[32] Thanks to Philip Stratton-Lake for reminding me that Scanlon doesn't adhere to the claim throughout *What we Owe to Each Other*. He claims (although he probably shouldn't) that the property of being wrong is reason-providing, but doesn't regard it

often one's most important reason for doing what would satisfy a desire one has is that it would be worthwhile or honorable (1998: 49), and that the task of practical reflection on reasons is to characterize the concrete forms of value that can be achieved in action (1998: 65–9). Jay Wallace takes this tension to indicate that Scanlon's real concern is with "the relation between general and specific concepts" (2002: 447). He reinterprets the buck-passing account as claiming that general evaluative claims can be "understood as ways of signaling that there is some specific reason for action in the offing, a reason that can be characterized by specifying the particular way in which the action in question would be valuable" (Wallace, 2002: 448). Scanlon endorses this reinterpretation: "My thesis was that goodness is not itself a property that provides reasons, not that the underlying properties that do this are always natural properties. . . more specific evaluative properties often play this role" (Scanlon 2002: 513).[33]

One form of partial buck-passing then restricts (BP*) to "general" as opposed to "more specific" value properties. Wallace's comment on Scanlon's example of a pleasant resort illustrates the view:

> To say that a resort is "pleasant," for instance, is a way of adverting to the distinctively positive qualities of experience that are enjoyed by a visitor to the resort. It is not merely an evaluatively neutral description of the natural properties of the resort or of the experiences induced by the resort in its visitors, and this is what makes it appropriate to think of pleasure itself as a concrete category of evaluation. (Wallace, 2002: 448)

Wallace doesn't say what he means by 'advert', but he assumes that pleasure is a form of value that provides reasons.[34] It is, however, unclear what makes a value property count as specific or general. (If general value properties are meant to be such properties as being of final value, the view faces the problems discussed above.) The illustration is partly to blame. Being pleasant, like being conducive to pleasant experiences, is a singularly

as a natural property (Scanlon, 1998: 10–12, 147–8). For a discussion of the relation between buck-passing about value and buck-passing about rightness, see e.g. Dancy (2000: 165–7).

[33] Of course, for reasons given in s. 2, I think that the emphasis Scanlon places here on (BP$^-$) is misleading.

[34] On one reading, what Wallace means by 'advert' is that to call something pleasant is to recommend it, perhaps in the sense of ascribing to it a positive value property. But the fact that speakers can use a term to recommend shows neither that it is a value term nor that its referent is a value property. A more plausible sense in which calling something pleasant is a way of adverting to the presence of value is that one pragmatically presupposes or implicates that it instantiates some positive value property, without implying that being pleasant is itself a value property. This happens if e.g. we operate with the substantive but cancellable assumption that pleasure is good.

bad example of a specific value property. *Schadenfreude* and the pleasant experiences that activities such as sadism and genocide induce in some people give us no reason to respond to those activities or experiences favorably (at least, not as parts of these wholes). If so, being pleasant isn't necessarily connected to reasons in the way that buck-passers suppose value to be. It is less plausible to regard being pleasant as a value property than as a property that can make its bearers better (or worse, depending on the context).[35] But the distinction between specific and general value properties is meant to distinguish *among* properties to instantiate which is to *be* valuable (in a particular way), and we cannot do that by appealing to properties that *make* their bearers valuable. The illustration fails to appreciate the distinction between being valuable and making something valuable.

Even if we found better examples of specific value properties, the distinction between general and more specific value properties would have the wrong kind of structure to restrict (BP*) only to some value properties. Whatever the distinction is supposed to be (and this remains unclear), generality and specificity are *relative* and *gradable* notions: one thing (say, beneficence) can be general relative to another (such as kindness) and yet specific relative to a third (such as virtue), and relative generality comes in degrees. As such, the generality/specificity distinction tells us nothing as to where, on the continuum of relative generality vs. specificity, an ascription of a value property is supposed to be an ascription of the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*) rather than an ascription of some more substantive value property. The problem, of course, is that the distinction marks only a difference in degree among value properties, whereas any form of partial buck-passing requires a difference in kind between purely formal higher-order value properties and substantive value properties. Hence the generality/specificity distinction as such gives us no grounds not to apply (BP*) throughout the continuum if we apply it anywhere.[36] Any plausible restrictions on the scope of (BP*) must have some other source.

[35] We can interpret Wallace's occasional talk of "particular forms" and "concrete modalities" of value accordingly.

[36] There are other distinctions which partial buck-passers might deploy in lieu of the generality/specificity distinction. For example, one might try passing the buck from properties that mark the genus 'value' onto its species, or from determinable value properties onto their determinates. Both options face the problem of where to draw the line between purely formal and substantive value properties. For example, a property can be a determinable relative to one property but a determinate relative to another: consider being red, being scarlet, and being colored. And species of value may themselves be genera that include more specific value properties. Even if we drew the line by

A different distinction to which partial buck-passers might appeal in this neighborhood is that there is an intuitive sense in which ''thick'' value properties, such as kindness and generosity, are specific, whereas ''thin'' value properties, such as being of final value, are general. We might then think that each thin value property is the sort of higher-order property we find in (BP*) whereas thick value properties are some more substantive sort of value properties that are eligible to provide reasons.[37] But this proposal faces a dilemma.

A familiar dispute about thick value properties is whether they can be ''disentangled'' into distinct non-evaluative and thin evaluative components. Either they can or not. If they cannot, then they are eligible to provide reasons (see below). If they can, then we can analyze, for example, the property of being generous (as a property of persons) as a disposition to act in certain (non-evaluatively specifiable) ways towards others, plus the fact that this disposition has thin value. In that case buck-passers about thin value deny that the property of being generous is eligible to provide (ultimate) reasons and instead take the reason-giving property to be the non-evaluative component of generosity (that is, the disposition to act in certain ways towards others).[38]

On the one hand, then, if the disentanglement claim is true, the normative buck continues onto the non-evaluative components of thick value properties. I suspect this broadens the scope of (BP*) beyond thin value properties. If a buck-passer offered just an account of the thin value component of a thick property, not an account of the property as a whole, the account would have trouble distinguishing different thick value properties from each other. For example, it would have trouble accounting for the differences between the responses for which, say, generosity, bravery, and elegance call without appealing to our notions of generosity, bravery,

restricting (BP*) to those determinable value properties that don't themselves fall under any determinable, or those genus properties that don't themselves fall under a genus of value, these options would face the further problem that neither genus nor determinable properties are, in general, purely formal higher-order properties. Determinables, such as being shaped, mark genuine categories of difference, but not merely in virtue of their determinates; the parallel point goes for genus properties, such as being a mammal. In that case determinable and genus properties wouldn't count as instances of (BP*) simply in virtue of being determinables or of marking a genus. So, neither distinction is structurally cut out to restrict (BP*) only to some proper subset of value properties.

[37] Although the literature usually speaks of thick and thin evaluative *terms* or *concepts*, I'll discuss the property version of the distinction in order to maintain my focus on metaphysical issues. Perhaps the thin/thick distinction is what Wallace and/or Scanlon really have in mind, although if that is the case I wonder why they don't just say so.

[38] I owe this distinction between buck-passers' options on thick properties to Stratton-Lake and Hooker (2006: 152).

and elegance. The account would also be inadequate to the standard characterization of thick value properties as those that satisfy evaluative concepts whose applicability is both world-guided, in the sense of being constrained by non-evaluative criteria, and action-guiding, in the sense of indicating reasons for action.[39] For it would be adequate only to the ''action-guiding'' conjunct. It would be adequate to the ''world-guided'' conjunct if it also told us what the properties quantified over in the relevant instance of (BP*) are. (This would also help to distinguish different thick properties from each other.) But an account that captures both conjuncts broadens the scope of partial buck-passing from thin to thick value properties. For it makes thick value properties merely higher-order properties (albeit not purely formal ones). So, we have reason to think that if the disentanglement claim is true, forms of partial buck-passing built on the thin/thick distinction either are inadequate or border on all-out buck-passing.

On the other hand, if thick value properties cannot be disentangled into distinct evaluative and non-evaluative components, then they are eligible to play the reason-giving role. The normative buck won't continue onto a distinct non-evaluative component of a thick property, since the property *has* no distinct non-evaluative component to play the reason-giving role. This might seem like good news to partial buck-passing. Like the generality/specificity distinction, however, the thin/thick distinction marks only a difference in degree along a spectrum of value properties (Scheffler, 1987: 417–18), whereas partial buck-passing requires a difference in kind. Were the disentanglement claim true, we might try holding the thin value component constant and explaining differences in degree in terms of differences in the specificity of the relevant non-evaluative components. But if that isn't an option, the thin/thick distinction will tell us nothing as to where along the spectrum an ascription of a value property is supposed to be an ascription of the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*) rather than an ascription of some more substantive value property. Hence the distinction as such gives us no grounds to apply (BP*) anywhere on the spectrum if we don't apply it to thick value properties, and no grounds not to apply it all across the spectrum if we apply it to thin value properties. So, we have reason to think that forms of partial buck-passing built on the thin/thick distinction border on all-out buck-passing.[40]

[39] See e.g. Williams (1985: 129, 140) and Hurley (1989: 11–13).

[40] If any thick value property has a distinct, self-standing non-evaluative component, that component typically is plausibly not analytically distinct from the evaluative component, but rather can be isolated only by substantive normative theorizing. This would seem to be in tension with buck-passers' claim to be advancing a formal account of value which is compatible with any substantive normative and evaluative theory.

So far I have argued that the forms of partial buck-passing surveyed above are unstable. A further source of pressure towards all-out buck-passing is that partial buck-passing cannot claim for itself a putative advantage of the buck-passing approach to value. The attraction is ontological parsimony: if value is analyzable in terms of reasons, what we might have regarded as two separate normative categories are reducible only to one. As Derek Parfit puts it, "in believing that certain aims are good, or worth achieving, [buck-passers] are not committed to normative properties other than the property of being reason-giving, or committed to normative truths other than truths about reasons" (Parfit, 2001: 38). Since partial buck-passers think that there are some substantive value properties, the argument from ontological parsimony can seemingly support all-out buck-passing at best.

If the above forms of partial buck-passing are unstable, this might be because value properties share some characteristics that explain their instability. That would unify the case that partial buck-passing is unstable. Some writers suggest that values have some kind of "unity" that distinguishes them from other values and in virtue of which their components hang together the way they do.[41] If a unity were a structural feature of value properties on many levels of generality, one would expect that either all value properties are purely formal higher-order properties or (more plausibly) none are.[42] The idea that value properties involve a kind of unity, in virtue of which they are structured as they are, is intriguing. It could explain why certain, but not all, possible ways of organizing the various aspects of value properties constitute distinct categories of evaluative difference (Raz, 2003: 133). But as I cannot explicate such a unity to my satisfaction, I rest my claim that partial buck-passing is unstable on my

[41] See e.g. Raz (2003: 39) and Chang (2004: 16). I don't claim that Raz or Chang intend this suggestion to speak against the buck-passing account of value, although at least Raz clearly rejects the buck-passing account.

[42] Typical examples of values that putatively have a unity, such as philosophical talent (Chang, 2004: 16–17), concern "values" in the presently irrelevant sense of properties that make things have their value properties (see n. 5). But the idea that value properties that combine certain constituting qualities without being simply reducible to them have some kind of unity has some intuitive pull. Aristotelian *eudaemonia* is a possible example: being *eudaemôn* collects together its various constituents, such as the virtues as well as certain types of pleasures and honors, and organizes and balances them with respect to each other in an evaluatively distinct way (see e.g. Stocker, 1990: 172). This mode of organization is evaluatively distinct because how well different options satisfy the claims of *eudaemonia* to be protected, aspired to, and so on, isn't simply a matter of how well they satisfy the claims of the constituents, considered merely as separate evaluatively relevant dimensions. What it is even to count as *eudaemonia* is a matter of combining the constituting qualities of *eudaemonia* in the right sort of way, the way exemplified by an excellent life. Perhaps *eudaemonia* has, in this sense, a distinctive sort of unity of its constituting qualities.

grounds for thinking that the particular forms of partial buck-passing discussed above are unstable. Since buck-passers usually take themselves to be partial buck-passers, this result, though inconclusive, is important.

4. Resisting All-Out Buck-Passing

All-out buck-passing strikes many people as incredible: what good reason could we have for thinking that *no* value property *ever* is eligible to provide reasons? One might wonder, though, whether this reaction implicitly begs some crucial question. Here I offer a case for resisting all-out buck-passing which isn't subject to this worry: buck-passers advertise their approach to value as metaethically neutral, but all-out buck-passing turns out to require controversial metaethical assumptions and, in addition, to incur troublesome explanatory debts. Giving an adequate defense of all-out buck-passing therefore requires defending its metaethical commitments and discharging its explanatory debts. The case for resisting all-out buck-passing is the stronger the more demanding this task is.[43]

We have already seen all-out buck-passing to incur one controversial metaethical commitment. It requires that each thick value property be analyzable as a possession of two distinct properties—namely, a certain non-evaluative property that is reason-providing and a "thin" value property—but this disentanglement claim is famously controversial.

While card-carrying buck-passers tend to be non-naturalists about normative and evaluative properties, they aren't non-naturalists qua buck-passers. The basic thrust of their approach to value is neutral between naturalism and non-naturalism. But all-out buck-passing turns out to be incompatible with certain sophisticated forms of evaluative naturalism. Consider, for example, the form of naturalism according to which value properties are clusters of mutually supporting physical, medical, psychological, and social goods unified by homeostatic mechanisms (Boyd, 1988: 203–4; cf. 194–9, 216–17). No value property that is a homeostatic unity is plausibly regarded as the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*). According to all-out buck-passing, the reasons connected to the

[43] The fact, noted in s. 2, that the distinction between partial and all-out buck-passing is relative to a conception of what properties count as value properties complicates matters. Restrictive conceptions might count some forms of buck-passing that I construed above as forms of partial buck-passing as forms of all-out buck-passing instead. Permissive conceptions might make all-out buck-passing much more inclusive than its proponents would be willing to grant. My case for resisting all-out buck-passing won't be entirely immune to these complications, but mostly my discussion will require only relatively modest assumptions about what properties count as value properties.

presence of any such property would apparently have to be provided by the non-evaluative properties in the given cluster. We cannot identify the higher-order property of having such properties with the value property because the former leaves out part of the latter, namely the homeostatic unity among the clustered properties.

In response, all-out buck-passers might try to include the relevant homeostatic mechanisms among the reason-providing properties. Suppose I have reason to engage in some co-operative effort. If a value property just is a group of homeostatically clustered goods, the co-operative effort must, if it is to be valuable, support and be supported by other goods, such as friendship and recreation, via the psychological and social mechanisms that contribute to the homeostasis. Apparently what provides me the reason to engage in the effort would have to be either (i) that doing so will tend to foster the realization of these goods and sustain the homeostatic mechanisms on which their unity depends or (ii) that doing so will tend to foster co-operation. Either way, all-out buck-passing is inconsistent with homeostatic naturalism. Given the homeostatic naturalist conception of value properties, (i) implies that, contrary to all-out buck-passing, the reason I have is provided by a value property. Regarding (ii), suppose that engaging in co-operative effort sometimes does but at other times doesn't tend to foster the realization of the goods in question and sustain the homeostatic mechanisms on which their unity depends. If so, the tendency of some activity to foster co-operation sometimes does, but sometimes doesn't, provide reasons to favor it. Given homeostatic naturalism, what the effort fosters when there is reason to favor it is the instantiation of a value property. But in that case we can explain the variability of reasons by reference to value: something is a reason to ϕ in one case because ϕ-ing fosters an instantiation of a value property but isn't a reason to ϕ in another case because ϕ-ing fails to do so. Of course, if a value property explains why certain considerations have the property of being reasons, it cannot be the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*).

Let's move on to the explanatory debts of all-out buck-passing.[44] I argued earlier that the trouble partial buck-passers have with finding distinctions among value properties which would explain why only some value properties should be the sort of purely formal higher-order property we find in (BP*) generates internal pressure towards all-out buck-passing. In order for the lack of such distinctions to favor, rather than count against, all-out buck-passing, all value properties must in addition be shown to be

[44] I actually think that all-out buck-passing incurs yet further controversial metaethical commitments, but have no space to argue the point here.

purely formal higher-order properties rather than some more substantive sort of properties. I'll argue that such a project has dubious prospects.

Consider generosity. We might analyze it in part as the disposition to benefit others out of one's own resources without being intrusive or expecting esteem or compensation, and perhaps out of sympathy for their ends. Given that being generous is a value property (to attribute it to people surely is to evaluate them), what bestows the higher-order property of having other properties that provide reasons for certain pro-attitudes on this complex disposition? All-out buck-passers cannot say that the disposition itself does so if we characterize it partly in evaluative terms like 'benefit'. They should specify the goods with which, and the ends in pursuit of which, a generous person is disposed to aid others in the specified kind of way in non-evaluative terms. They might, for example, analyze being generous as (*a*) having the disposition to desire or pursue for others, without being intrusive or expecting esteem or compensation, those resources of one's own which one would desire or pursue for them if one cared for them for their own sakes plus (*b*) the fact that having that disposition provides reasons to take certain pro-attitudes to its bearers.[45]

Analyses of thick value properties along these lines incur serious explanatory debts. Why, for example, are the non-evaluative aspects of generosity related as they are? The properties that make someone beneficent don't provide reasons for the attitudinal responses for which generosity calls when, for example, she also intends to gain others' esteem or expects compensation. What explains why the presence of the latter properties makes this kind of difference between reasons of generosity and reasons of beneficence? One possible explanation is value-based. The way in which generosity organizes its non-evaluative aspects gives it evaluative aspects that beneficence lacks, for we take the two properties to bear differently on agents' moral worth. But then attitudes that are appropriate to generosity are not appropriate to the evaluative nature of esteem-seeking beneficence. But if it is *because* of the distinctive evaluative nature of generosity that its bearers have the higher-order property of having properties that provide the relevant reasons, generosity is distinct from that higher-order property. All-out buck-passers owe us an explanation that is superior to the explanation premised on the assumption that generosity is a substantive value property.[46]

[45] I intend (*a*) as a rough approximation of the buck-passing account of welfare defended in Darwall (2002).

[46] All-out buck-passers cannot discharge this explanatory debt simply by saying that truths about reasons are the basic normative truths. The question of what explains the difference in reasons is perfectly legitimate, and no less legitimate if the notion of a reason for something, paraphrased as a consideration that counts in favor of it, is primitive

All-out buck-passers might seek to undercut the explanation of reasons in terms of value properties by trying to capture the differences between generosity and beneficence in terms of reasons. The most promising strategy seems to be to locate the differences in the reason-providing properties, rather than in the attitudes. Perhaps, for example, the properties that make something beneficent provide reasons to favor their bearers in ways appropriate to beneficence without providing reasons to favor them in ways appropriate to generosity when they are parts of ''wholes'' whose other parts are properties such as intending to gain others' esteem or expecting compensation.[47] If the ways in which a whole is valuable are determined by its parts in some sense holistically, we might try to capture this evaluative structure in terms of an analogous holism of reasons.[48] One version of this idea is that, even if the beneficence-making properties are pretty much the same as the generosity-making properties, the other parts of a beneficent whole may entail the absence of those background conditions (such as not seeking esteem) which enable the properties that make it beneficent to make it generous. Such a view would require some potentially controversial claims about which properties of generous persons provide reasons for the relevant attitudes and which amount merely to the necessary background conditions for the properties in question to provide those reasons. But the general project would be to emulate the structure of a value property in terms of the conditions under which the base properties quantified over in the relevant instance of (BP*) provide reasons for the attitudes for which the bearers of the value property in question call.

I find this project problematic. Suppose a property which gives reasons to respond to its bearer in a certain way does so only in the presence of some

(Scanlon, 1998: 17). Even if the notion of a reason is a conceptual primitive, it doesn't follow that there is no explanation of why a certain consideration has the property of being a reason. Then it doesn't follow that truths about what sort of differences in the non-evaluative properties of things make what sort of differences to our reasons are primitive truths. Moreover, the buck-passing account as such doesn't entail that truths about reasons are the basic normative truths, for it is consistent with the Humean view that the reasons that agents have are grounded in their desires. Scanlon (1998: 41–9) rejects the Humean view because of his further claim that reasons are the most basic normative elements of practical reason. Here I'll ignore Humean buck-passers about value.

[47] Instead of ''wholes'' we might speak of objects and their context.

[48] It might be that the value of a whole is determined by the values of its parts ''organically'', perhaps in the way Moore (1993: 79–81) thought, or that while the value of a whole is some non-organic function of the values of its parts, the values of those parts are contextually conditional (see Dancy, 2003; 2004: 176–84). In the latter case, the relevant sort of holism of reasons would be roughly that of Dancy (2004: 73, 38–43); in the former, it might be roughly that of Ross (1930: 19–20, 41–2). Unfortunately I have no space here for a fuller discussion of these issues.

conditions that enable it to give those reasons. Then the presence of such an enabling condition will play a role in the sustenance of value, thereby giving reason to preserve its presence. For were the condition not to obtain, the property that gives the reason wouldn't do so. If enabling conditions involve properties that provide reasons, all-out buck-passers must either regard them as valuable in some way or explain why these reasons don't ground value. The latter option faces the general problem of explaining why some properties that give reasons, but not others, ground value. (Purely deontological reasons to fulfill promises come to mind as another example of the latter.) The former option faces the problem that it is more plausible to treat the kind of "enabling value" in question as a relation to value than a relational form of value. While a condition that itself has no value cannot contribute value to an object, it may perfectly well play a vital enabling role with respect to the object's value.[49] For example, when an object has final value partly in virtue of being a unique instance of its kind, the non-existence of other instances appears to be a valueless condition, but one that enables the object to have final value.[50] In sum, doctrines about reasons with which buck-passers might seek to emulate the structure of value properties have problematic consequences when conjoined with all-out buck-passing.

Even if all-out buck-passers can defuse these worries, their task won't be finished. Finding doctrines about reasons which mirror the relevant doctrines about value does nothing to settle the question of which are explanatorily prior. All-out buck-passers must further show that the latter doctrines are better explained by the former than vice versa. But the converse direction of explanation is a strong contender. For example, the reasons that enabling conditions provide in virtue of the role they play in the sustenance of value is readily explained in terms of value and without a commitment to regard enabling conditions as having any special relational form of value.

A related explanatory debt of all-out buck-passing is to explain how, for any value property V, what distinguishes V from other value properties is solely a function of the reasons in terms of which it analyzes V. As we saw in section 2, buck-passers can avoid the circularity in saying that

[49] There are related grounds to doubt that "contributive value" (recall n. 28) is a distinct form of value. Philip Stratton-Lake writes: "For something to be contributively valuable is for it to stand in a better-making relation to the whole of which it is a part. Contributive value is, therefore, a relational form of value" (2002: 127). If a part cannot contribute to a whole more value than it actually has as a part of that whole (Dancy, 2003: 630–1), only what is otherwise valuable can be contributively valuable. But this does nothing to show that contributive value is itself a relational form of value, as opposed to a relation to value which it is possible only for valuable parts to instantiate.

[50] For a different sort of example, and a fuller discussion, see Dancy (2003: 634–5).

a value property calls for those attitudes that are appropriate to its value by appealing to our pre-theoretical views about the attitudes for which different value properties call. But this exposes them to the worry that our pre-theoretical views might distinguish finely enough neither between the responses for which closely related but distinct value properties call nor between the properties that provide those reasons. If so, there might be pairs of distinct value properties which are too similar in both respects for either to distinguish the properties. Buck-passers owe us some systematic account of why drawing the right distinctions won't in fact be a problem.

The worry is pressing in the case of value properties that bear no analytic connection to appropriate responses in the way that being admirable or being trustworthy do. As we now conceive all-out buck-passers' strategy, what suffice to raise the worry are mere pre-theoretical possibilities to the effect that two distinct value properties are associated with reasons that are too similar to distinguish the properties. For example, it seems pre-theoretically possible for the correct substantive theory of welfare to imply that we should respond to welfare subjects as if they were friends, that is, respond to them with the same kinds of attitudes, and on the same kinds of grounds, as we respond to friends.[51] (Such a theory wouldn't imply that we should *make* friends with welfare subjects.) Given a view that counts welfare and friendship as value properties, the application of (BP*) to each would in that event deliver the same higher-order property, when it shouldn't. This would be a reason not to identify either property with that higher-order property.

The example presupposes that the pre-theoretical data about welfare and friendship are consistent with the idea that we should respond to welfare subjects as if they were friends. Pre-theoretically, however, the properties that provide reasons of welfare and reasons of friendship do seem similar enough not to distinguish the two properties. For example, insofar as we think (as all-out buck-passers must) that the properties that provide these reasons are non-evaluative, prominent among them are the needs, interests, and desires of friends and welfare subjects. The relevant responses also seem similar enough. Reasons of welfare and those of friendship are reasons to respond to certain individuals, in whatever ways are appropriate, for their own sakes, and it is pre-theoretically possible that the responses are similar enough not to distinguish the two properties. Perhaps, in both cases, the relevant responses are those characteristic of a loving concern. In both cases, then, the relevant reason-providing properties and responses

[51] I am indebted to Christian Coons for suggesting this possibility. Ruling it out with a substantive conception of welfare would violate the spirit of all-out buck-passing as a formal analysis of value.

seem pre-theoretically similar enough not to distinguish between the purely formal higher-order properties with which all-out buck-passers would identify friendship and welfare.[52] The worry appears to generalize.[53]

Towards the end of section 3, I noted that the argument from ontological parsimony seems at most to support all-out buck-passing. As a form of theoretical economy, parsimony is only a defeasible merit: greater parsimony is preferable, but only insofar as all else is at least roughly equal. In this section, I have in effect argued that the other things aren't roughly equal for all-out buck-passing. We have seen that all-out buck-passing requires controversial metaethical assumptions, and that we may doubt whether all-out buck-passers can do better than their opponents in discharging certain explanatory debts concerning value properties and their relation to reasons. Hence ontological parsimony fails, at least for now, to provide any significant source of support for all-out buck-passing. Taken together, the above worries about all-out buck-passing constitute a good cumulative case for resisting it.

5. Conclusion

My resistance to the buck-passing account of value takes the form of a dilemma. Proceeding from the assumption that any form of the account is either all-out or partial in its scope, I first argued that the forms of partial buck-passing I surveyed don't succeed in restricting themselves only to certain proper subsets of value properties, and then built a resistance front to all-out buck-passing. Because buck-passers' basic format of value analysis is so schematic that it can be wielded in a diverse array of ways, my argument strategy against buck-passers has been to spray a buckshot of considerations against particular ways of wielding the format. In closing, I'll criticize a further positive argument for the buck-passing approach to value and offer some tentative positive suggestions.

Suppose buck-passers' opponents (*a*) accept that, whenever something is valuable (in a particular way), it also has the sort of purely formal

[52] Jussi Suikkanen suggested to me that it might be partly constitutive of friends' concern for each other that they have together formed a view of each others' needs, interests, and desires on some shared basis. The same doesn't seem true of an appropriate concern for non-friend welfare subjects, even if we should respond to welfare subjects as if they were friends. I think more needs to be said about how the suggestion is supposed to distinguish friendship and welfare from one another, rather than merely to distinguish the conditions for the presence of welfare-related and friendship-related reasons (which reasons may pre-theoretically be very similar to each other).

[53] Roger Crisp (2005: 82) has independently raised a very similar objection, using grace and delicacy as his example.

higher-order property we find in (BP*), but (*b*) regard this higher-order property as distinct from the property of being valuable (in that way). Philip Stratton-Lake and Brad Hooker argue that buck-passing is a better option for those who agree with the negative thesis that the fact that something is valuable never adds to the reasons provided by the properties that make it valuable. This is because the opposition "leaves unexplained why goodness *cannot* provide us with an additional reason," whereas

> the buck-passing account of goodness explains *why* the fact that something is good never gives us a reason to care about it. On the buck-passing account, the fact that something is good is the fact that it has other properties that provide reasons to care about it, and the fact that it has such properties *cannot* provide an *extra* reason to care about it. (Stratton-Lake and Hooker, 2006: 161)

Stratton-Lake and Hooker in effect claim an exclusive explanatory advantage to buck-passing.

The argument needs refinement, however, given the different possible scopes that (BP*) can take. Stratton-Lake and Hooker should claim that, for any value property V to which (BP*) applies, only buck-passers can explain why the fact that something is V never ultimately gives us reasons to respond to it in those ways for which its being V calls. This claim has a narrower appeal. If the disentanglement claim about thick value properties is false, any thick property is a better candidate for the relevant reason-providing property than the non-evaluative properties co-instantiated with it. Those non-evaluative properties are better candidates only if the disentanglement claim is true. But the opposition has resources to explain why thick value properties would in that event never provide extra reasons to respond to their instances in the relevant ways.

In discussing all-out buck-passing, I mentioned the view that we can appeal to value properties to explain the reasons that are necessarily connected to their instantiation. If the disentanglement claim about thick value properties is true, such a view could explain why the non-evaluative component of generosity (say) provides reasons for certain attitudes to generous things by saying that adopting those attitudes on account of the property in question is a response that is adequate to the way in which those things are valuable. If something's being generous provides an *explanatory* reason why certain of its purely non-evaluative properties give reasons for the attitudes in question, it is reasonable to suppose that being generous (or other thick properties) never provides an extra *practical* reason for those attitudes. For what could be the point of such double duty? The value property would already have made its difference to what we have reason to do. Since Stratton-Lake and Hooker's argument ignores accounts of this sort, it is persuasive only in conjunction with independent

arguments against them. Such arguments would, of course, seem to make theirs superfluous.

If we have good reasons to resist the buck-passing approach to value, where should we look for an alternative account of the relation between value and reasons? If value is necessarily connected to reasons but we cannot adequately account for truths about value in terms of truths about reasons, we should doubt that reasons are metaphysically primary. The intuitive default position seems in any case to be that they aren't. It is surely no accident that some considerations but not others count as reasons. Often we can explain *why* a consideration is a reason, and are unsatisfied if we cannot. (The question why a consideration possesses the kind of normative force that is characteristic of reasons is especially natural when its content is non-normative.) We might not always be able to appeal to value properties to explain why the properties that provide us with reasons for certain kinds of responses do so. For we might think that there are deontological reasons that have nothing to do with value. We could, however, try to construct a general schema for explaining reasons which doesn't apply exclusively to value properties.

In many cases the explanation of why a consideration with non-normative content is a reason might well go in terms of a value property. For example, if a sculpture like Bernini's *The Ecstasy of St Theresa* is sublime because of the double-faceted facial expression it portrays, it would seem quite natural to explain why this feature of the sculpture gives us reasons for certain responses by describing its relation to aesthetic sublimity. To say this isn't to deny that the instantiation of the former property ontologically grounds or realizes that of the latter. For that claim doesn't settle the normative question of why, when the latter property is a value property (or some other kind of normative property), the instantiation of the former property should have such relevance to the latter's instantiation. The ontological dependence of an instantiation of a value property on an instantiation of a non-evaluative property is one thing. The normative dependence relation in which an instance of the non-evaluative property stands to that on which it depends for its having the property of being reason-giving (a value property, perhaps) is different. Another illustration of this distinction would be a form of welfarism about reasons which grants that instances of the property of being good for a person are ontologically grounded in certain non-evaluative properties and that all sorts of considerations besides welfare might function as reasons, but holds that any consideration that *does* function as a reason depends for its having the property of being a reason on promotion of welfare. In other cases the explanation of reasons might not proceed in terms of value. It might instead proceed in terms of

deontological notions such as rights, fairness, or duty, or etiquettal notions, and so on.

If an explanatory schema of this sort were generally applicable, it would provide us with considerable explanatory gains. The resulting hypothesis about the relation between reasons and value would accommodate the negative insights that buck-passers emphasize. But it would avoid worries about distinguishing reasons that give rise to value from reasons that don't, as well as the other worries I have raised about the buck-passing account. Since I have said very little to develop or support this hypothesis, however, it would be premature for me to endorse it. But the alternative it constitutes to buck-passers' positive approach to value seems worthy of further consideration.

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